



Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
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4 October 2024

Dear Secretary of State

### **School Teachers' Pay: STRB's 34th Report and Government Response**

#### Overview

This is a joint response from the unions representing the vast majority of teachers and school leaders in England. We know that you will recognise the importance of the fact that the unions are united on key pay and conditions issues.

All of our organisations welcome the Government's decision to implement and provide additional funding for the 5.5% increase for 2024-25 recommended by the STRB. We are however clear that this must be just the first in a series of urgent steps to repair the damage to teacher pay, and therefore to restore the ability of the profession to compete effectively in the graduate labour market.

Schools should not be expected to carry on trying to cope with the problems caused by policy failure and historic underinvestment. The longer these problems are left unaddressed, the more damage will be done to our education service. The Government has a mandate for change and this includes addressing the problems faced by teachers and school leaders. This joint response to the statutory consultation on the STRB Report and the Government's response sets out our united view on the action that the new Government must take to ensure that pay and conditions properly value and support teachers and school leaders, so that the damaging recruitment and retention crisis is solved in the interests of our education service.

The remit letter for the next pay round rightly acknowledges the need to raise the status of the profession and tackle recruitment and retention – but also asks the STRB to have regard to school cost pressures when making its recommendations. We are clear that the recruitment and retention problems will not be solved without significant additional investment to reverse the pay cuts and reduce excessive and increasing workload. Funding is a political choice for the Government and the STRB should make the recommendations needed to solve the recruitment and retention crisis.

We want to work with you to solve the many problems that have been allowed to develop and deepen under previous administrations over the last fourteen years. To that end, we set out the key issues below. Solutions on all of these issues should be a matter for discussion and agreement between the Government and the unions. We look forward to engaging positively and collaboratively in those discussions.

### Pay levels

The STRB has again highlighted the damaged position of teacher and school leader pay relative to comparable professions. The STRB rightly describes this as a “structural deterioration.”<sup>1</sup> The STRB states that: “On a range of comparisons, the competitiveness of teachers’ average pay has reduced markedly over a number of years.”<sup>2</sup> The STRB highlights the continuing post-pandemic recovery in the wider graduate market.<sup>3</sup>

The huge real terms cuts to teacher and school leader pay since 2010 are clearly the key factor in the damage done to the competitive position of teaching. Teacher and school leader pay was cut by around 25% between 2010 and 2023 – much bigger real terms cuts than were seen in comparable graduate professions.

The damage to the competitive position of teaching is in turn a key factor in the recruitment and retention crisis that developed and deepened under previous administrations over the last fourteen years. Successive Secretaries of State have repeatedly sought to ignore the impact of their pay cuts and to downplay the recruitment and retention problems. Teachers, school leaders and parents, on the other hand, have seen the impact of the pay cuts and associated teacher shortages. We are confident that you will recognise that, in order to recruit and retain the teachers and school leaders we need, we must properly value them.

The extent of the pay cuts against inflation, and the consequent damage to the competitiveness of pay, means that real terms restoration of teacher and school leader pay and correction to the pay framework are needed to tackle the recruitment and retention crisis. Even after the September 2024 uplift, teacher and school leader pay is likely to be more than 20% lower in real terms than in 2010. We are clear that, to restore the pay lost in real terms and repair the damage

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<sup>1</sup> STRB 34<sup>th</sup> Report, page 1.

<sup>2</sup> STRB 34<sup>th</sup> Report, paragraph 2.16.

<sup>3</sup> STRB 34<sup>th</sup> Report, page 11.

done to recruitment and retention, future pay increases in this Parliament must be significantly above RPI inflation.

### Recruitment and retention

The STRB report sets out the extent of the recruitment and retention crisis. Data published since the STRB report was written show that the crisis continues to deepen. Teachers and school leaders know all about the impact of the recruitment and retention problems, but these problems hit parents and young people too. The recruitment and retention crisis also damages our economy, which depends on developing the skills and potential of our young people.

You will be keenly aware of how recent education policy has failed teachers, school leaders, pupils and parents on a range of metrics.

Recruitment against target has dropped to catastrophic levels in secondary and continues to be below target for primary. Almost all secondary subjects fail to hit their recruitment targets. The number of teachers from overseas who are awarded Qualified Teacher Status dropped by 60% between 2017-18 and 2022-23.<sup>4</sup>

The picture on retention is also alarming. The STRB report notes that leaving rates have returned to pre-pandemic levels and that: “This is a cause for concern.”<sup>5</sup> The STRB also notes the deeply worrying findings of the DfE’s Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders Survey conducted in spring 2023. This showed that more than a third of teachers and leaders (up from the already concerning quarter reported in the 2022 survey) said they were considering leaving the state school sector in the next year for reasons other than retirement.<sup>6</sup> Vacancy levels are sharply up, as the STRB also noted.

The STRB makes the connection we highlighted earlier between pay levels and recruitment/retention. The STRB states that: “spending too little may also give rise to serious problems with subsequent costs which can represent poor value for money.”<sup>7</sup> This is a key point that recent Government policy has failed to grasp. Investing in our education service and in the teachers and school leaders who deliver it is essential to the country’s economic prosperity. Cuts to teacher and school leader pay are a false economy, creating shortages across the school system and inhibiting the ability of our education service to play its essential role in producing the economic growth we need.

In June, after the STRB had completed its report, the latest School Workforce data was published. The findings<sup>8</sup> amplified concerns about recruitment and retention.

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<sup>4</sup> STRB 34<sup>th</sup> Report, paragraph 2.33.

<sup>5</sup> STRB 34<sup>th</sup> Report, paragraph 2.38.

<sup>6</sup> STRB 34<sup>th</sup> Report, paragraph 2.40.

<sup>7</sup> STRB 34<sup>th</sup> Report, paragraph 2.50.

<sup>8</sup> School workforce in England, Reporting year 2023 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

The proportion of entrants who were newly qualified dropped to 41% (from 45% the previous year). The number of newly qualified entrants in 2023-24 was down by 24% compared with the pre-pandemic period (2019-20 figure). Primary recruitment was the lowest since 2010, with the target missed for the ninth year in the last fourteen. Secondary recruitment targets were missed by 50%. Vacancies were six times higher than in 2010 and had increased by 43% in one year.

One in four teachers left the profession within three years, and one in three within five years. More teachers left the profession for reasons other than retirement between November 2022 and November 2023 than at any other time on record. Retention rates worsened for every yearly cohort bar one. Leadership aspiration and retention data reveals comparable problems. The DfE's workforce data shows that almost one in three (31%) school leaders appointed aged under 50 leave their post within five years of appointment, more than half (53%) of whom quit teaching in state-funded schools entirely.

All of these developments reinforce the need for major improvements in pay, workload and working conditions, and removal of excessive accountability, for which all of our organisation call. The STRB states, in the context of what it calls "systemic and persistent shortages," that the profession lacks a "coordinated long-term strategic workforce plan aimed at ensuring staffing levels are sufficient and sustainable."<sup>9</sup> We are open to discussing such strategic plans with the Government.

### Career paths

The STRB again calls for "further work to develop career pathways and supporting structures." It notes the importance of "clarity and coherence" in the context of career paths.<sup>10</sup>

Clear career pathways are indeed essential. Without any objective justification or evidence, previous administrations dismantled the national pay structure and imposed performance-related pay (PRP). These developments significantly reduced the transparency and fairness of the career structure, adding to the recruitment and retention problems. We urge the new Government to repair the damage caused and to secure clarity, coherence and fairness in the pay structure, by reversing these damaging policies.

We welcome your confirmation that the obligation on schools to operate PRP is being withdrawn. The damage done by PRP has been immense. Individual teachers and school leaders have seen their pay progression unfairly blocked. Teaching as a profession has been unable to offer the pay progression that should be the norm to recognise the acquisition of expertise and experience. Potential and serving teachers and school leaders know that their career development can be unfairly blocked due to factors beyond their control, such as decisions on the school budget. PRP has also contributed to the workload problems, to the excessive accountability regime and to conflict between staff.

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<sup>9</sup> STRB 34<sup>th</sup> Report, paragraph 2.59.

<sup>10</sup> STRB 34<sup>th</sup> Report, paragraphs 2.56-2.58.

Instead of unfair PRP and fragmented pay arrangements, we need a fair and transparent national pay structure based on the key principle of equal pay for work of equal value, which offers portability and fair pay progression. National minimum pay points should be mandatory for all teachers and school leaders. Alongside competitive pay levels, such a national pay structure would support recruitment, retention and mobility across the school system. This is the direction of travel we need from the Government, if we are to effectively support teacher and school leader career pathways.

### Targeted pay

All of our organisations are opposed to targeted pay on the basis of location, subject or phase - we regard this as divisive and likely to lead to greater pay inequality. We think there are other non-pay mechanisms that could be used to support retention/recruitment in response to local circumstances, some of which might fit with the Government's objectives for decentralisation. We do **not** believe that some teachers should receive additional payments because they are, for example, physicists as they undertake the same duties as all other teachers.

The STRB accepts that implementation of targeted pay could have a "negative overall effect" if it is not "broadly recognised as fair and reasonable." We urge you to listen to the consensus on this issue and reject any moves to targeting of pay.

### School funding

The STRB's pay recommendation required additional funding and we welcome the new Government's decision to provide additional funding for the pay award for September 2024.

We have seen remits seek to constrain the STRB to making recommendations within an inadequate funding envelope. Funding shortages meant that it was impossible to secure the improvements needed to pay, conditions, recruitment and retention within the existing funding envelope.

We need objective analysis of the improvements needed. We urge you to ask the STRB to review all of the relevant evidence and to assess all of the solutions needed, without requiring it to work within existing inadequate funding levels. It must then be for the Government to secure the investment needed to fund the improvements we need to teacher and school leader pay and conditions.

### Workload

Fully funded improvements in workload are an essential component of addressing longstanding recruitment and retention challenges, alongside properly funded improvements in pay.

The newly elected government must go further than its predecessor was willing to reduce workload and sustain it at manageable levels, keeping valued expertise in the profession and enhancing pupils' education. The STPCD is one of the tools that should be used. Our members are clear on the need to tackle workload associated with accountability, pupil behaviour, SEND, and the lack of availability of external professional support for a wide range of pupil needs. We also call for the removal of the open-ended hours clause in the STPCD to address the excessive weekly working hours experienced by teachers and school leaders.

In addition to the long hours teachers and leaders are working (DfE Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders Survey Phase 2) staff are also leaving the profession due the increased intensity of their workload. There are a few interconnecting factors driving workload intensity in schools. The first is the rising complexity of pupil needs, particularly in cases involving Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), which requires more individualized attention and tailored support. As a result, teachers must spend additional time on planning, monitoring, and engaging with pupils, leading to heightened work demands.

The second is class sizes, which remain high. Currently, secondary class sizes in England are the highest in at least 45 years resulting in more than one million pupils being taught in classes over 30. This impacts teachers' ability to manage classrooms effectively, offer personalized feedback, and ensure that struggling students receive adequate support. Teachers are stretched due to managing larger groups and the sheer volume of work associated with the increasing number of students under their care.

Thirdly, workload intensity is also driven by a punitive inspection and accountability system, which continues to represent a risk to life. We welcome the initial step taken by your Government in removing overarching inspection judgements, but full system reform, rather than 'evolution' of current arrangements is urgently required.

Finally, the lack of flexible working options further compounds this issue, limiting teachers' ability to balance their workload and personal lives, thus intensifying work pressures. Larger class sizes, the increased complexity of pupil needs, and a lack of flexible working options all contribute to a decline in teacher morale and wellbeing. Unless addressed through better recruitment, retention, and workforce management strategies, workload intensity will continue to harm teachers and impact the quality of education students receive.

There are signs that new approaches to advance flexible working in schools is being developed, but further collaboration is needed to bring about a step change both nationally and locally. Broader thinking is required to ensure flexibility and appeal to demanding and important professional work. The STRB should investigate and recommend further flexible working options for education staff. Flexibility has a positive impact on morale, work/life balance as well as increased wellbeing, job satisfaction, and attendance. Allowing staff to work from home when possible and promoting varied flexible working options in schools

and academies is the right thing for staff, the right thing for the pupils they teach, and the right thing for a government that needs to address a chronic teacher retention crisis.

Until workload is reduced, and teachers have a reasonable work/life balance, the government will continue to miss its recruitment targets and retention will continue to be damaged, which only adds to the problem, undermining the quality of education young people will receive. Significant reductions in workload and improved flexible working along with sustained, real terms improvements in pay are vital to ensure the necessary supply of the teachers and school leaders the education service needs.

### Conclusion

We know you agree with us that teachers and school leaders deserve better than pay cuts and ever increasing workload. We know that you share our view that pupils and parents deserve better than teacher shortages across the curriculum. We want to work with you on the solutions to the many problems caused by the underfunding of education and undervaluing of educators. We look forward to your positive response to our united position on the key issues set out above.

Yours sincerely



Daniel Kebede  
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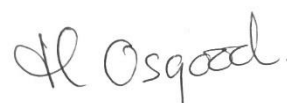
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